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Chris White, Sacred Webs. The Social Lives and Networks of Minnan Protestants, 1840s—1920s, reviewed by Mark McLeiste

Citation for published version:

McLeister, M 2018, 'Chris White, Sacred Webs. The Social Lives and Networks of Minnan Protestants, 1840s—1920s, reviewed by Mark McLeiste', *Studies in World Christianity*, vol. 24, no. 2, pp. 175-176.
<https://doi.org/10.3366/swc.2018.0219>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.3366/swc.2018.0219](https://doi.org/10.3366/swc.2018.0219)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Studies in World Christianity

Publisher Rights Statement:

This article has been accepted for publication by Edinburgh University Press in the Studies in World Christianity, and can be accessed at: <https://www.eupublishing.com/doi/abs/10.3366/swc.2018.0219>

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Chris White. 2017. *Sacred Webs: The Social Lives and Networks of Minnan Protestants, 1840s-1920s*. Leiden: Brill, pp. XIV + 289, Hb €127.00. ISBN-13: 9789004339163.

As the author himself asserts, within the study of the history of Christianity in China, the lives of Chinese Protestants – both as individuals and as groups – are one of its least studied aspects (5), making this work an important addition to the small but growing literature on the Chinese narratives of Protestantism. Adopting a micro-history approach, White's study of *Minnan* (southern Fujian) Protestants draws on local sources and extensive archival research and really does deliver on providing a rich and detailed account of the lives and agency of individual Chinese Protestants and their networks through the late Qing and into the Republican era.

Besides an Introduction, a brief historical sketch of *Minnan* and its history and a Conclusion, this monograph is divided into three sections, accompanied by useful images and maps. Section 1 (*Displaced Gods and Riceless Christians: The Processes of Conversion among Minnan Protestants*), comprised of two chapters, focuses on the continuities and divergences of Chinese religious practices during and after the conversion process. Of central importance to this section is White's critique of the assumption that people converted primarily for tangible benefits, and instead analyses the multiplicity of reasons for conversion, while providing specific examples which demonstrate the extent to which converting to Protestant Christianity, for example, resulted in social exclusion, and/or loss of employment (Appendix 1 also details incidents of Protestant converts who relinquished employment to gain church membership). Over four chapters, Section 2 (*Movers and Shakers: Mobility and Conflict in Minnan Protestant Communities*), demonstrates the pivotal importance of Chinese Protestants in proselytising efforts which led to the rapid expansion of the religion in the region. The early journey to significant degrees of autonomy from foreign missions for many of the *Minnan* Protestant churches further places the agency of local converts at the centre of the narrative. The final section (*The Liberating Gospel: Xu Chuncao and Spiritual and Social Activism of Minnan Protestants*), comprised of a single chapter, situates Protestantism as a more widely accepted religion within Chinese society in the early twentieth century and reveals the extent to which individual Protestants played significant roles in bringing about social and political change in *Minnan* and beyond.

However, while this study provides a rich and colourful account of the lives of Protestants in *Minnan*, and engages with wider debates on the conversion process and the agency of Chinese converts, I feel that the book does not engage fully with the concept of Protestantism as a Chinese religion. The somewhat limited Conclusion would have been an excellent place to extend the discussion on this topic.

Despite this shortcoming, this monograph places Protestant Christianity in a specific locale, highlighting the processes and practices which made converts *Minnan* Protestants and accounts for its expansion in the important urban centre of Xiamen as well as in rural settings. It will therefore be of interest to scholars of the history of Christianity in China as well as researchers of World Christianity and anthropologists and sociologists of contemporary China who research Chinese Christianity.

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